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THE TASK AND EDUCATION OF MOSES.*

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Three thousand two hundred years ago, Egypt and the Egyptians were already old. At that date, remote as it is, their most glorious period was in the past. Their grandest temples and pyramids were built; their finest art had been produced; their widest extension of boundaries had been reached; their greatest characters had appeared and had done their work. In short, the creative, originating period of the national life was over. All that the Egyptians, in the way of ideas and the realization of ideas in the arts, were capable of adding to the world's stock of civilization, they had already completed. It is true that a long career was still before them; but their function in world-history was to be conservation. Their future work was to guard the intellectual treasures which they had amassed, and to give these out to the later world in such ways and at such times as would conduce to general progress.

In sharp contrast to this ancient highly civilized people, whose creative energy was spent, stood the Semitic tribes that inhabited Goshen, the north-east section of Egypt. They were in the first flush of youth. To their physical vigor and moral energy the fears and wiles of the Egyptians strongly testify. The first fact, therefore, of which we need to take account, in explaining the antagonism between the Israelites and the Egyptians, is the incompatibility between an old, fully developed civilization, on the one hand, and on the other, a nascent, almost embryonic, one.

A second fact, entering even more deeply into the explanation of this antagonism, is the radical difference between the religion of the two peoples. That of Egypt offers many difficult problems. Its beginnings we cannot trace. There is ground for the view that it was originally monotheistic. It is well established that this doctrine prevailed among the priests; but as the religion was interpreted to the people and understood by them, it had, long before the day of Moses, degenerated into a coarsely idolatrous polytheism. Its temples were grand; its ceremonials were impressive; it did not countenance the cruel and licentious rites practiced by the neighboring Asiatic peoples; it taught the immortality of the soul and a future of rewards and punishments. But because it did not teach a just idea of divine holiness, it could not awaken in its devotees a profound sense of sin; and consequently the morality which it developed was formal and external. Its symbolism, drawn in large part from the animal world, was strange, and in some respects revolting. This symbolism influenced greatly the prevalent forms of idolatry, and goes far towards explaining the grotesque features of Egyptian worship. All things considered, the religion was so directly the product of the Nile valley and of Egyptian character and experience, that it could not be intelligible or useful to other peoples. To the masses it was a relig-

* This article was originally prepared to be read before the students of Amherst, as one of six *Talks* given, during the spring term, by different professors, on topics relating to the times of the Exodus.

ion of observances; in so far as it retained the power to inspire, it acted only on the priests. On account of its extreme conservatism, it was altogether unsuited to the genius of a young, progressive people. The Israelites, on the other hand, had inherited a belief in one God. Their ancestors, the patriarchs, had received this through a possibly primeval revelation, strengthened by personal revelations to themselves. Moreover, their situation, in a region between Egypt and Asia where the landscape was pastoral, and the Nile and the desert were less dominant influences, tended to maintain among them fidelity to this cardinal principle of the Hebrew religion.

A third source of antagonism was difference of political character. The Egyptian monarchy was highly despotic. The Israelites, accustomed to the looser and freer pastoral organization, could not, without violence to what was deepest in their natures, accept and bear the Egyptian political yoke. We see, therefore, that union between Egyptians and Israelites was impossible; for the differences were radical.

The connection of the Israelites with Egypt lasted, according to one set of authorities, four hundred and thirty years; according to another, two hundred and fifteen. It is conjectured that this connection began in the desire on the part of the Egyptians to have a friendly but warlike Semitic people as an outpost toward Asia, to defend Egypt against possible invasions by other Semitic peoples; just as the Romans looked to certain German peoples along the Danube for defense against other German peoples. After a time, however, the danger from the East passed away, and the Egyptians began to fear that, in certain contingencies, the Israelites might turn against the state, which it had been their office hitherto to defend. Influenced by this fear, they adopted the monstrous policy of trying to render them incapable of offense, not indeed by massacre, which would have been comparatively merciful, but by destroying their character. How long the bondage continued we have no means of ascertaining. Ewald, basing his view on the extent to which, at the time of the exodus, the Israelites had retained their martial spirit and moral vigor, thinks that it may have been less than fifty and could not have been more than a hundred years. The attempt to degrade the Israelites to a position analogous to that of the Fellah of to-day, was not successful. That wonderful durability, almost indestructibility, of character which later Jewish history discloses, was foreshadowed in the days of the oppression. Cruelty, instead of breaking them down, only made them more Israelitish. This process, however, could not continue indefinitely. The day was fast approaching when the deepening antagonism must be decided by force. The outlook for the Israelites seemed hopeless. They could not expect to defend themselves against the Egyptians. Humanly speaking, there was before them either quiet submission, or a short desperate conflict closing with defeat, separation from kindred, and the worst forms of slavery. It was a juncture that concerned more than the Israelite and the Egyptian. It was a crisis in world-history. The immeasurable service to human progress which the Jewish nation was to render seemed in jeopardy. Deliverance came through Moses.

The nature of his work has already been indicated. It was necessary to win the confidence of the Israelites, to organize them, to negotiate on their behalf with Pharaoh; and since a full and healthful development of this people on Egyptian soil, subject to Egyptian influence, and exposed to Egyptian enmity, was not possible, it was necessary to lead them to a land suited to their genius—the land of their origin. Meanwhile, another task, the most difficult of all, must be

undertaken, namely, the education of the Israelites for the exalted career to which they were destined. For this work Moses needed the highest and most varied qualifications. First, and most important because it was the foundation of his wisdom and power, he must be a prophet. Not otherwise could he win or deserve the confidence of his own people; not otherwise could he sufficiently influence their enemies. The exigency called for resources and wisdom more than human. It was the assurance that Moses through his character as prophet had received such wisdom and was entrusted with such resources, that first united the people in obedience to his commands. But the prophet must also be a military commander; for only through him who stands in intimate communion with the Giver of victory, can the highest courage and fortitude of the people be called forth.

Moreover, the prophet and commander must, in addition, be a statesman; for this people were yet imperfectly organized, and their institutions but half established and altogether inadequate. In the work of supplying these defects there could be little aid from precedent, for the institutions of the Egyptians and of the other best known peoples were, in the main, not only inapplicable but dangerous to the end in view. The loneliness which was so marked a feature of the life of Moses was foreshadowed by the nature of his task; if of human companionship he had little, of human example he had absolutely none. On the other hand, in one respect he was highly favored. Perhaps there never was a time when the popular mind was more open to influence and instruction. The mingling of gratitude and trust, of docility and aspiration, which deliverance would awaken, would give an unequalled opportunity for public education.

This was, therefore, the proper time, not only for promulgating the highest truths, but also for creating those institutions through which these truths might gradually enter into and transform the life of the community. In addition to the functions of prophet, commander and statesman, it seemed necessary, for a time at least, that Moses should administer justice.

Since the exodus, this union of high and diverse functions in the person of one leader has been repeated more than once. It is seen in the case of Mohammed, and on a greatly diminished scale in our own day, in that of the late Mahdi, in opposing whom Gordon lost his life. It testifies to the insight and cleverness of Bonaparte, as well as to his audacity and want of scruple, that he tried to confirm his power over Egypt and prepare the way for the conquest of the East, by assuming in addition to the role of soldier and statesman that of an inspired character whose services to Islam had been foretold in the Koran.

The uniqueness of the leadership of Moses consists less in the number and character of the functions he assumed, than in the manner of discharging them. In him the grandeur of the prophetic office received its highest expression; beside him, the greatest prophets of other religions seem pygmies. Mohammed, in so far as his message was new, was intelligible only to certain martial and passionate, half civilized peoples of Asia and Africa. To Moses progressive mankind has listened, and must forever continue reverently to listen; for the truths he taught are the only basis of durable and healthful progress.

We have now to inquire through what original qualities of person and character, and through what process of education, Moses was prepared for his work. The traditions represent him as possessed of "almost superhuman beauty." "Exceeding fair" are the words of Stephen. That his countenance gave fit expression to the exalted ideas and emotions which filled him, we are told in the

account of his descent from Sinai bearing the two tables of testimony: "And Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone . . . and when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him." To his strength testify not only the smiting of the Egyptian and the successful contest with the Midianite shepherds; but more conclusively still, the mighty work he accomplished; the unexampled public burdens he sustained, even in advanced years; and finally the words which describe his death: "Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." We are certainly justified in the belief that the physique of this most laborious and enduring of inspired men was capable of responding fully to the exacting requirements of his position, and was in harmony with his fiery and majestic spirit.

The extent to which Moses was indebted to his Egyptian culture must remain a matter of conjecture. We are told that "he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Ewald says: "It was certainly not a chance that the very highest gift bequeathed to us by a remote antiquity germinated on that soil alone which had already for thousands of years been more deeply intellectualized than any other country on earth." That the indebtedness was great, is self-evident. Through his study in Egypt, Moses, the destined guide and teacher of a young people just entering upon their career in world-history, became acquainted with the best fruits of the oldest civilizations. In the wisdom of his legislation, we find abundant proof that the author is a man deeply versed in the experience of an older people, and indeed of the world. Indirectly the wisdom thus gained manifests itself not only through the adaptedness of the Mosaic legislation to the nature, the present wants, and future development of a peculiar people, but also in his refusal to adopt the institutions of Egypt. To an ignorant or a half-educated leader of an aspiring people, the temptation to copy servilely from those more advanced in civilization would have been irresistible. But the clearest proof of the indebtedness of Moses to the Egyptians is found in the universality of the principles he promulgated. To this, his study and criticism of the "wisdom of the Egyptians" must have been an invaluable aid.

The traits of the character of Moses are first revealed in that event which led to his exile. The account in Exodus is as follows: "And it came to pass, in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way, and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." Our immediate concern is not directly with the ethical character of the deed—interesting and instructive as that undoubtedly is. We pass it by with the remark that, unlike an ordinary act of murder in which the perpetrator in order to secure a private end disregards and violates the public interests, Moses here, in order to serve the public interests of his people, disregards and jeopardizes his private interests. This extenuates, but does not justify. The same plea might be urged in behalf of the assassin of William of Orange, though not with equal validity. What really concerns us in the narration is, Does it reveal a fitness for leadership? The answer is clear: It reveals a fitness, and, at the same time, an unfitness, or rather, an unpreparedness; it discloses a promise, but a promise the fulfillment of which is conditioned upon a further development and discipline of character. The fitness consists in his devotedness; he forgets himself absolutely; he imperils every personal interest, because of his zeal for the welfare of his brethren.

This he maintains to the end; its highest expression was reached when Moses, after the lapse of the Israelites into idolatry, offered his own soul as an atonement for their sin: "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold! Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." History knows only one act of devotion which surpasses this.

On the other hand, the slaying of the Egyptian reveals, with no less distinctness, a passionateness, a predominance of the emotional nature, which would make successful leadership impossible. It is a truism that self-mastery is the first condition for the exercise of control over others. Moses slew the Egyptian not only because he would defend and avenge his people, but also because he was not as yet fully master of himself.

Then came the sojourn of Moses in the wilderness. What part had it in his education? History testifies often to the aid which nature, untouched by the hand of man, can give in spiritual things. In the solitudes, where the voice of man is not heard, the divine voice becomes audible. It is not too much to say that during this period Moses came gradually to know God as he truly is, and as he was to be revealed to the Israelites, and through them to the world. The special appearance in the burning bush was only the climax in a long process of divine revelation; but it is a turning-point in the life of Moses, marking the completeness of his preparation for the leadership of the Israelites. It is likewise a turning-point in the history of the world. No other revelation of the divine character and will, save one, has so deeply entered into, and so radically transformed, the affairs and the character of mankind. The words are as follows: "And he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. . . . And God called out unto him from the midst of the bush. . . . And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." This crowning experience of the preparatory period of the life of Moses is strictly analogous to what we call conversion. The essential features are quite the same. First, a revelation of God which destroys self-will; second, a hearing and acceptance of one's allotted task in the world, as co-worker with God.

The self-mastery which Moses had lacked he now possessed. Nothing calms the passions, nothing clears the judgment like converse with great characters and great ideas. Moses had talked with God, and had learned to think the thoughts of God. Nothing steadies, sobers, and rationalizes conduct like the weight of high responsibility. Unto Moses God had assigned the most difficult, and at the same time, the most exalted task which man can undertake.